



Fóram na nÓg Consultation

Youth Work through
the medium of Irish:
Reasons to take part



October 2014

Youth Work through the medium of Irish:

Reasons to take part

Consultation with young people and youth workers

Contents

1. Purpose of Consultation
2. Methods Used
3. Questionnaires
4. Focus Groups
5. Coiste na nGael Óg
6. Conclusions and Recommendations
7. Appendices



1. Purpose of Consultation

Fóram na nÓg is the representative organisation for the Irish-medium youth sector. It works to ensure that the youth services which are provided to young Irish speakers are of the highest possible standard, and to encourage the growth and expansion of youth services through the medium of Irish in all areas.



Fóram na nÓg recognises the importance of youth work being youth led, and believes that this should be reflected in all that it does as

an organisation. Therefore, Fóram na nÓg has carried out this consultation in order to enable children, young people and youth workers to share their thoughts and opinions on the Irish-medium youth sector. The aim of this consultation is to identify the strengths and weaknesses which exist in the sector and to give them an opportunity to say what they would like to see happening in the sector in the future.

The findings of this consultation will be incorporated by Fóram na nÓg into its future planning for the sector and will be used to help identify the organisation's main priorities.

2. Methods Used

In order to gain the best possible understanding of the thoughts and opinions of young people and youth workers in the Irish-medium youth sector, a number of methods were used. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used during this consultation. Firstly, questionnaires were completed in Irish-medium schools in order to assess the levels of participation in youth clubs and to find out why young people take part in youth work through the medium of Irish in the first place.

Secondly, a series of focus groups were carried out with both young people and youth workers. These focus groups were carried out within Irish-medium youth clubs and provided an excellent opportunity for those involved in youth work through the medium of Irish to share their experiences and opinions, with a view to improving the services that are



available to them.

Finally, as a result of some of the recommendations and discussions outlined above, Fóram na nÓg has assisted the setting up of Coiste na nGael Óg. Coiste na nGael Óg (or 'the Committee of Young Irish Speakers) brings together Irish speakers between 16 and 18 years of age in order to discuss various issues relating to the Irish-medium youth sector. Coiste na nGael Óg will be used as a means of continuous consultation in order to ensure the thoughts and opinions of young people remain central to the strategy of the Irish-medium youth sector.

3. Questionnaires

Two different questionnaires were completed by young people in post-primary



Irish-medium education, between year 8 and year 12. The first questionnaire was completed by those who regularly attended an Irish-medium youth club, and the other was completed by those who do not participate in any of the Irish-medium youth clubs which are currently available. These questionnaires provided information primarily on the reasons why young people did or did not participate and the availability of information to them about Irish-medium youth services. Below is a summary of the main findings of the questionnaires. The

full detail of the answers received can be found at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Knowledge of Youth Groups

The first question that participants who attended an Irish-medium group asked how they had first gained their knowledge of the existence of their Irish-medium youth group in the first instance. It is not only important that Irish-medium youth services are available to young people, but it is also very important that they know about these services and are able to access them. Figure 1 below shows the answers which were received.

Figure 1

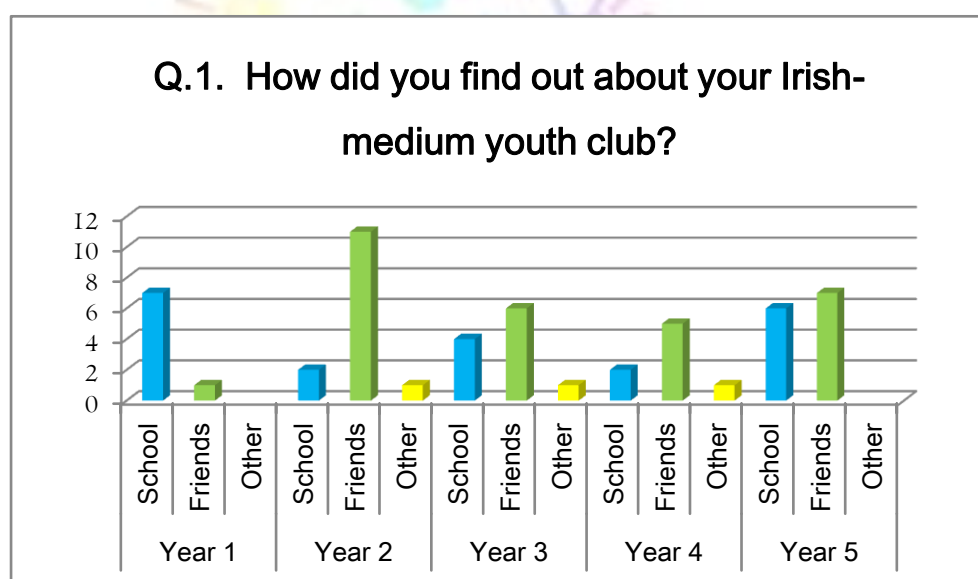


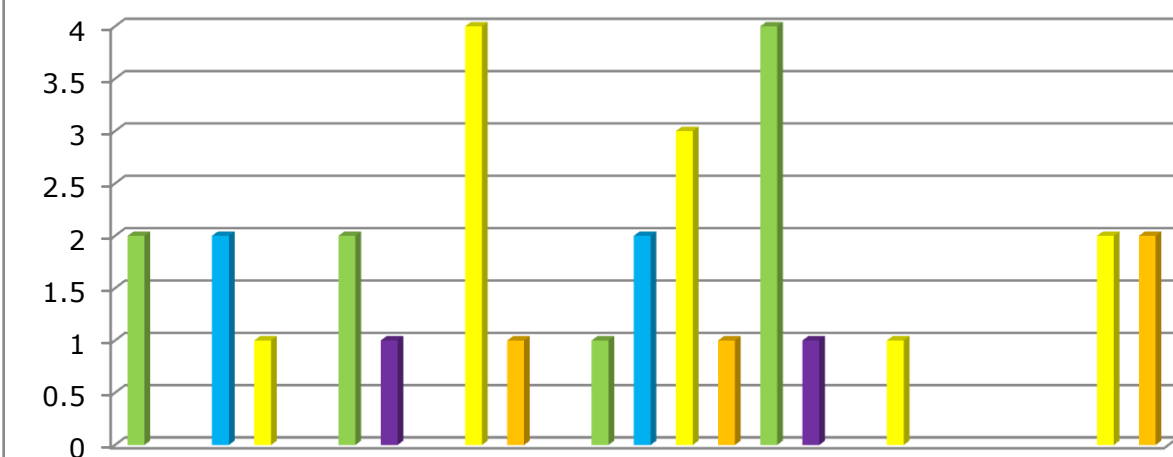
Figure 1 shows that the two main methods through which young people obtain information about Irish-medium youth clubs in the first place are through their school and through their friends. This shows that word of mouth is an extremely important method of getting information to young people about their local youth clubs and underlines the importance of

providing high quality youth provision that young people are excited about and want to share with their friends.

Participation

Of the respondents who did not attend an Irish-medium youth group, 51 responses were received, 40 (78%) indicated that they did know about their local youth group and 11 (22%) stated that they did not. This indicates that there are still students who are not aware of the existence of youth provision in their area, but that there are also a high number of young people who choose not to participate, which is common across the youth sector in general. Figure 2 below shows the reasons that were indicated by these young people as to why they choose not to participate in the services currently available.

Figure 2: Why don't you take part in your local Irish-medium youth club?



Key:

- Not interested
- I don't want to do Irish outside of school
- I'd rather take part in an English-medium club
- I don't know how/where to take part
- Other Interests

The answers here show that there is a wide range of reasons why these people chose not to participate, and that the age of the young person doesn't have a very strong effect on this. It is clear that even though the majority of respondents stated that they were aware of the existence of a youth club in their area, they did not know how to become a member of this club or take part in its activities. Therefore, more information is needed as to what activities take place within a youth club and the days, times and locations that the youth clubs take place.

Opening Hours

Young people were asked whether they would attend the youth club more often if it were available. Of the



54 responses to this question, 46 (85%) indicated that they would attend more nights if the club were open, and only 6 (15%) replied that they wouldn't want to do this.

Opportunity to Speak Irish

Out of the 52 respondents to the questions on whether they had any other opportunities to speak Irish outside of school aside from the youth club, 41 (79%) said that they did not. Almost all respondents (98%) who avail of Irish-medium

youth services stated that they felt that participating in an Irish-medium youth club benefited their levels of Irish and all respondents agreed that it is important to have an opportunity to speak Irish outside of school. These answers show how important it is that Irish-medium youth groups are available to children and young people in Irish-medium schools in order to help them to gain the maximum benefit from their educational experience.

4. Focus Groups

According to Denscombe (2007; 178),

"Focus groups consist of small groups of people who are brought together by a 'moderator' (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a specific topic."



On this basis, a series of focus groups were carried out in three different youth clubs in January 2014 with young people between the ages of 11 and 16, and with the youth workers and volunteers who work in these clubs. These focus groups

gave an opportunity for further discussion to take place and allowed the young people to voice their own concerns, opinions and ideas. The questions which were asked at these focus groups can be found at Appendix 3.

4.1 Focus Groups with young people attending Irish-medium youth clubs

The answers below deal with the answers which were received in these various focus groups on a question by question basis rather than dealing with each particular group individually, in order to allow for the considerable overlap in the answers which were given.

Part 1: Youth Work

1. Why do you participate in a youth club?

Three main reasons emerged as to why these young people participate in a youth club. These were:

- The chance to socialise with friends
- The activities which are organised by the youth club
- The opportunity to speak Irish outside of school



The main reason which emerged for the young people questioned attending the youth club was that the young people's friends also attended the same youth club, making it a socially enjoyable experience for them. The youth club provides them with an opportunity to spend time with their friends outside of school hours, in a safe and secure place. It was important to these participants that an accessible, welcoming place was available to them to spend their time and socialise with their friends in an informal way.

The second reason that emerged was the quality of the youth work and activities that they take part in and the opportunities for learning that they receive through the youth club. The groups mentioned how the youth groups give them an opportunity to learn about things that they wouldn't have an opportunity to learn about in the same way



in school. The informal learning environment in youth groups as opposed to the academic school setting enables the young people to engage in more open discussion about different issues and topics.

These first two reasons which emerged could be commonly shared with young people throughout the youth sector, but a reason that was mentioned



very often as to why these young people participate in youth work in the first place was the opportunity to speak Irish socially. The language element was very important to them and they were enthusiastic when talking about the activities that take place through Irish, outside of school.

2. Do you think that youth work is important? Why?

The reasons given by the young people as to why they think that youth work is important were broadly similar to the reasons that they participate in a youth club in the first instance. The work that is done in the youth club is different from that which is done in school and they felt that they were able to engage with the topics covered in a more positive way.

Another reason given as to why the participants felt that youth work is important is because it allows them to use their Irish in a social environment. Most of the young people who attend Irish-medium youth groups attend Irish-medium

schools. The answers given, however, strongly indicated that the youth club was an important way of integrating the language into their lives, socially and informally.

Part 2: The Irish-medium sector

3. Do you think that attending the youth club helps with your Irish?

As was seen in the questionnaires, the young people indicated that they did feel that the youth club helped with their Irish, as they had an opportunity to use their Irish in a non-academic environment. The more informal setting was encouraging for the young people as they do not feel that their academic skills are being tested by teachers when they are speaking Irish. Again, the participants mentioned the benefit of using their Irish in a more social manner as it meant that they spoke about different topics and issues than they would have in school, which added to their vocabulary and to the language acquisition process.



4. Do you have an opportunity to use Irish outside from school and your youth club?

Most of the participants replied that they do not have any other opportunities to speak Irish aside from at their school and at the youth club. This answer was given for a number of reasons. Some mentioned that their families did not speak Irish, which limited their opportunities to speak Irish at home, and others mentioned that they had many friends outside of school who do not speak Irish, and so the children automatically use English in order to interact socially with their broader social circle.

Another reason given by many participants as to why they do not make use of their Irish outside of school is that they are nervous or reluctant to use it in public when they aren't sure if those around them have Irish also. Even when speaking to their friends who do have Irish, they admitted to still being hesitant to use Irish due to the possibility of other people overhearing them and challenging them on their use of Irish. Although this attention might not always be negative, the participants simply didn't want to draw attention to themselves in this way.

5. Do you think that you would see a big difference if you attended an English speaking youth club?

Some participants stated that they felt that there was a very positive atmosphere in their youth club. They suggested that because Irish was spoken in their clubs, everyone already had something in common with each other and was therefore able to get to know each other quite easily. The participants mentioned that they enjoy the youth work which takes place within their club, but also that the Irish language element is a very important reason as to why they choose to take part in it, even when they are, often better resourced, English-medium youth clubs in their local areas.

Part 3: Your Experience

6. What are the best things about this youth club?

When asked about the positive aspects of their youth club, many of the participants mentioned the

strong relationships that exist between the young people in the youth clubs and the youth workers at those clubs. Irish-medium youth clubs, generally speaking, have lower numbers than English speaking clubs have, and the participants indicated that they enjoyed this aspect of their club, as it



allowed those in the group to get to know each other more easily.

A large number of participants indicated that the Irish language was, for them, the best aspect of their club. This was particularly important for young people who had attended an Irish-medium primary school and then had moved on to an English-medium secondary school. The Irish-medium youth club provides these children with an important, and perhaps their only, opportunity to use the Irish that they have learnt. There was also praise from the young people for the various forms of youth work that is carried out within their youth clubs. Also mentioned as a positive aspect of the youth club were the trips that they take and the group work that they do on various topics. The young people expressed a wish that more of this work could be carried out, particularly the group work and other organised activities of this nature.

7. What are the problems with this youth club?

Participants mentioned various different problems in each of the youth clubs where the focus groups took place. These problems didn't involve the actual youth work that is carried out in the clubs, but concerned the facilities and resources that are available to their club. Some suggested that the buildings in which the youth clubs take place could be improved. In addition to this, some mentioned that there are not as many

resources available to them as they would hope, especially in relation to musical instruments or art supplies.

8. What would you like to see in this youth club in the future?

When asked what they would like to see in their youth club in the future, the answers received were very much based on the structures that were already in place, with more facilities available. As was seen in the questionnaires, many participants replied that they would like to see their youth club open more nights per week so that they could attend more often, or that the opening hours on existing nights would be extended. Another idea shared was that more trips would be made available to them, particularly if they would be able to carry out activities through Irish on these trips. A unanimously voiced opinion was that they would like to see better facilities made available to the club, both in terms of the building and infrastructure, and of the resources that the club has access to when carrying out youth work also.

9. What could be done to attract more young people to this youth club?

The participants in these focus groups were asked this as the vast majority of them attend Irish-medium schools and so know other young people who do not currently participate in youth work. They could identify the reasons why they chose to participate and share opinions on why they believed that others chose not to do so. The main reasons mentioned for the

current lack of participation among some young people at present were a lack of knowledge about the availability of youth services and the purpose of youth work. This was particularly prevalent among young participants, who mentioned that they didn't think that their school friends understood the reasons why youth work was a positive experience, and were afraid that it may be too much like an extension of the school day. Older participants suggested that this was no longer the case, but that young people who had never participated before were unlikely to do so once they were older, because they might be involved in other things such as sports clubs etc. or decide not to become involved for other reasons.



One method by which this issue could be addressed was through making leaflets easily available in schools and other places where young people would have access to them which would contain information on

the clubs, their locations and the activities which take place. It was also suggested that it would be beneficial to visit schools directly in order to talk to young people about the youth clubs and the benefits of youth work. The questionnaire showed that there is a high number of young people who do not participate

as they aren't sure how to take part, and doing this would address this issue.

Another idea which was shared in order to encourage more young people to take part in youth clubs was through the use of social media. This would raise the profile of the youth clubs and enable the young people to become aware of Irish-medium youth work through a method that is already familiar to them.

4.2 Focus groups with youth workers in Irish-medium youth clubs

The following answers are based upon three focus groups which were conducted in January 2014. The same questions that were asked of each group of youth workers and can be



found at Appendix 4. The youth workers questioned identified a wide range of strengths and weaknesses within the Irish-medium youth sector at present. The answers received contained a great deal of overlapping issues and flowed naturally into other areas of concern. Therefore, the information below is not divided by group or by question in order to

avoid repetition.

The main themes which were discussed by the youth workers involved the positive relationship which exists with the Irish language community, the training and resources which are needed by the sector and the understanding and recognition which is needed in order to effectively develop the Irish medium youth sector and meet the needs of the young people.

4.3 Positive Relationship with the Irish language Community

One of the main strengths of the Irish-medium youth sector that was identified by all youth workers was the positive relationship that exists between Irish-medium youth clubs and the Irish language community. Youth workers have found that the Irish language community is an important source of support for youth work, often in the absence of resources or assistance from other sources.

Youth workers stated that, in their experience, the Irish language community recognises the dual importance of Irish-medium youth work in providing important services to young people through the youth work which is carried out, and also the role that it plays in providing young people who are in immersion education the opportunity to speak Irish outside of school on a regular basis.

One youth worker explained how youth work is of particular significance to young people who are in immersion education as the Irish-medium youth groups enable those attending to develop their social vocabulary and use the language in a non-academic environment. Youth work through the medium of Irish carries with it the same benefits and advantages that are seen with youth work carried out through English. The added element of further language acquisition is of particular importance to this sector, given the educational experience of the young people who avail of these services.

This positive relationship with the Irish language community means that the links between the various Irish-medium youth clubs are also very strong. This enables the sector to draw on each other's experience and to share examples of best practice.



4.4 Capacity to deliver

One of the main problems in the Irish-medium youth sector at present is that there are not enough youth workers available in order to provide the necessary youth services. As the Irish-medium youth sector is relatively young in its development, there is a lack of experienced, qualified youth workers who are able to take on leadership roles within the sector. Some participants suggested that although there is training available which is tailored to the Irish-medium youth sector, there are too few people able to deliver this training to youth workers who require it, especially outside of the Belfast area. This means that although this resource is available to the sector, it lacks the capacity to make full use of this.

There is also a need for more training to be made available to Irish-medium youth workers which is available through Irish and tailored to the experience of the Irish-medium youth sector. Youth workers identified a difficulty in implementing training which had been received exclusively through English, as the methods taught and ideas that are to be implemented have to be translated and transferred onto a different scenario. This training also doesn't cater for the different experience of Irish-medium youth clubs, meaning that the youth workers have to address issues surrounding bilingualism and the immersion environment themselves.

4.5 Facilities and Resources

There is a concern among youth workers that the assistance given to Irish-medium youth groups is tokenistic

and does not sufficiently recognise the range of needs within the sector.

Another major challenge faced by the Irish-language youth sector at present is the lack of suitable facilities for Irish-medium youth clubs. This includes the buildings in which youth clubs take place, the resources which are available to the clubs and the facilities for youth work outside of the club which exist.

A suggestion offered by some youth workers was that more could be done to raise awareness of the Irish-medium youth sector throughout the entire youth sector. This could be done, for example,



through providing training for all youth workers, both English and Irish speaking, about youth groups which operate in an immersion setting.

It is often the case that an Irish-medium youth club will be sharing facilities with an English-medium youth club, making use of the same building and other resources on different nights of the week. Although this arrangement has been beneficial in enabling clubs to become established in areas where there is no alternative accommodation, this can

sometimes cause difficulties. Although two clubs may share the one building, they do not always share the resources within that building, meaning that art supplies or musical instruments, for example, may be on the premises for the English-medium club, but are then not available for the Irish-medium youth club. Given the early stages of many Irish-medium youth groups and the limited resources they have available to them, this can greatly restrict the club's activities.

As is seen in the consultation that was done with the young people who make use of these services, they find planned activities and group work particular enjoyable with the youth clubs. The youth workers stated that there are times when they find it difficult to provide these services through the medium of Irish due to the lack of suitable resources available to them. The lack of appropriate learning materials means that the youth workers have to create their own resources in order to carry out this work through Irish. It takes a great deal of time, energy and cost for the youth workers to produce appropriate resources themselves, which could be better directed into other areas of their work. This can be particularly difficult for youth workers who are trying to prepare youth work on drugs awareness or mental health, as the terminology involved may be new to both them and the young people. This problem is not unique to the youth sector, as the Irish-medium education sector also experienced these problems, and continues to do so to an extent.

4.6 Trips/activities done through English



Another difficulty faced by the sector is that when Irish-medium youth groups are taken on trips, activities are almost exclusively carried out in English. Taking trips outside of the youth club in order to carry out activities is

a long established element of youth work, and not one which Irish-medium youth groups should miss out on. At present, the options that are available to youth workers when selecting destinations for trips through Irish are severely limited, meaning that trips are very often conducted at least in part through English, which conflicts with the ethos of the club and one of the core purposes of Irish medium youth work.

5. Coiste na nGael Óg

Coiste na nGael Óg is a representative forum made of young people who are involved in the Irish-medium youth sector.

Through this forum, young people have an opportunity to share their opinions and ideas about the direction of

the Irish –medium youth sector on an ongoing basis. The matters discussed and the decisions taken by Coiste na nGael Óg influence the actions taken by Fóram na nÓg. Through Coiste na nGael Óg Fóram na nÓg can ensure that it remains closely linked with the opinions and wishes of the young people who avail of Irish-medium youth services. This is a form of ongoing consultation which enables the Irish-medium youth sector to remain youth driven.



6. Conclusion

This consultation has shown that one of the main reasons why children and young people are participating in the Irish-medium youth sector is because of



the language element involved in their clubs. From a linguistic and social perspective, the participants showed overwhelmingly that they find that the Irish spoken in their clubs is beneficial to them and to their peers within the club.

What these participants would like to see in the future for the Irish-medium youth sector is that more youth services and facilities would be available through Irish, in order to enable them to gain a full experience of all aspects of youth work through their chosen language. They also would like the Irish medium youth sector to be mainstreamed and recognised within the broader youth sector.

Many of the participants in the consultation mentioned that they would like to make more use of Irish-medium youth services if they were available. Fóram na nÓg should, therefore, focus on expanding the capacity of the sector and of individual clubs through training and the provision of new Irish-medium resources in order to assist the sector in meeting the growing demand for these services.

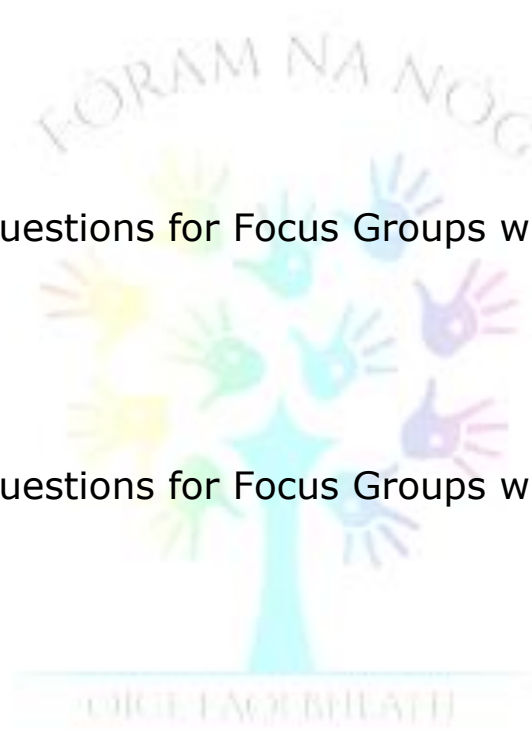
8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire results for youth group members

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire results for non-youth group members

Appendix 3 – Questions for Focus Groups with children and young people

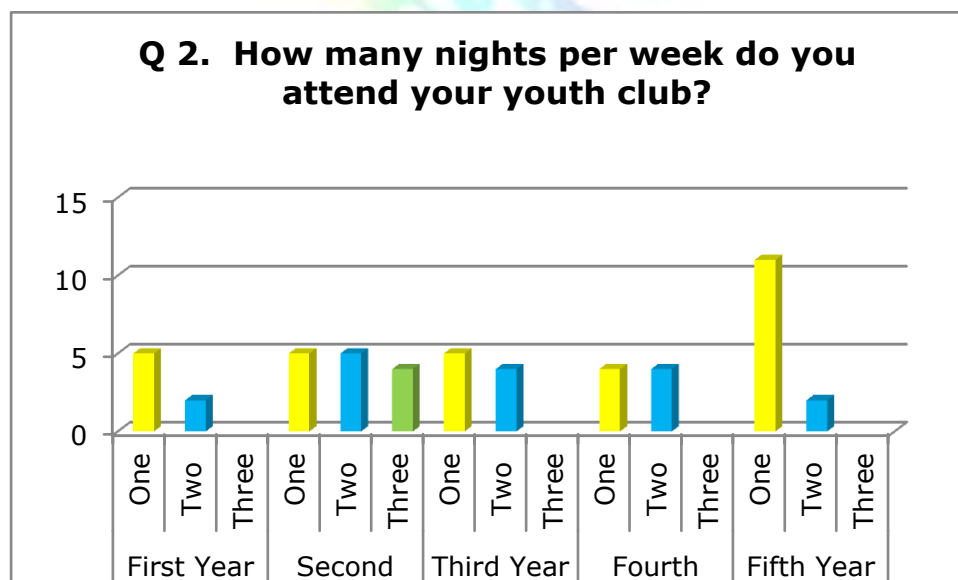
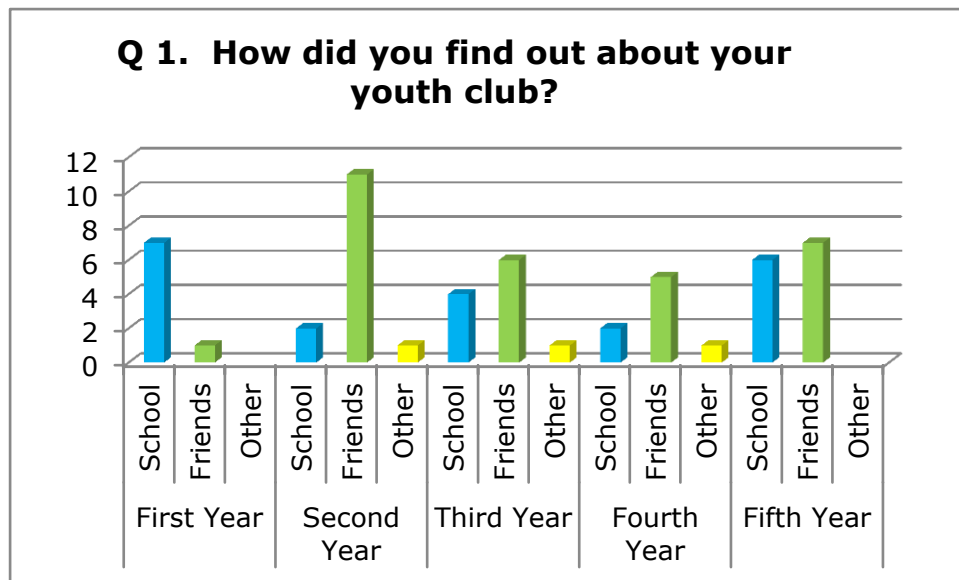
Appendix 4 – Questions for Focus Groups with youth workers



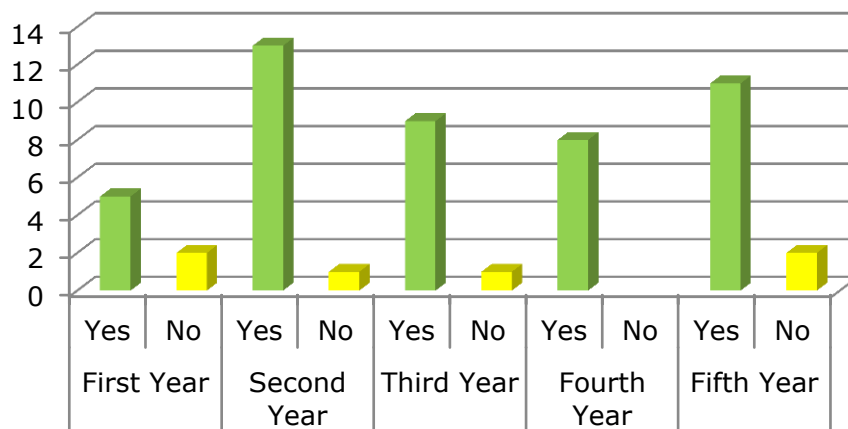
Appendix 1

Questionnaire Results

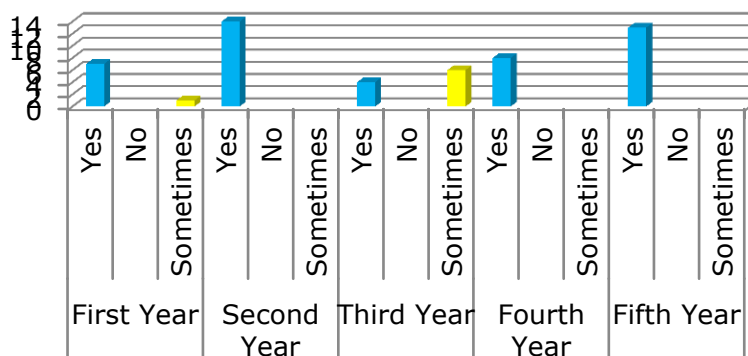
The following questions were asked of young people in Irish-medium education who regularly attend an Irish-medium youth group.



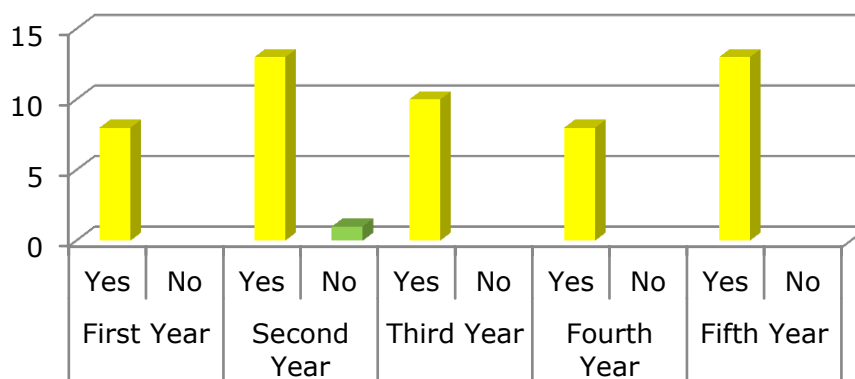
Q 3. Would you attend your youth club more often if it was available?



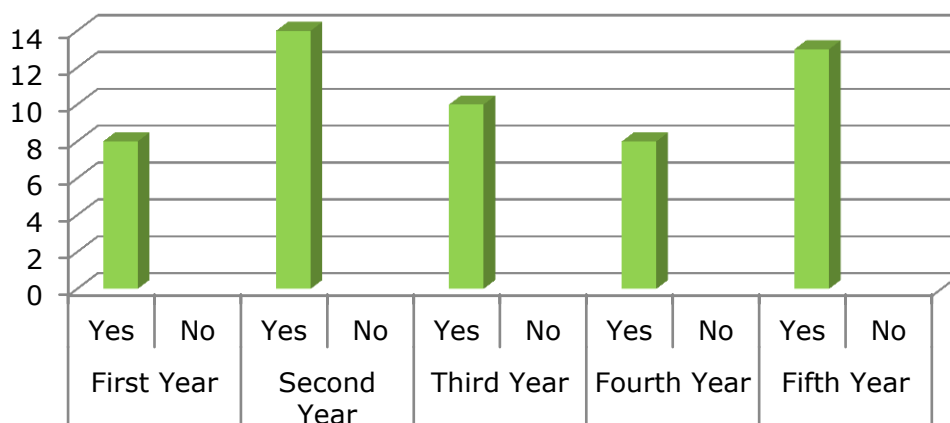
Q 4. Would you rather be a member of an Irish-medium youth club than an English-medium club?



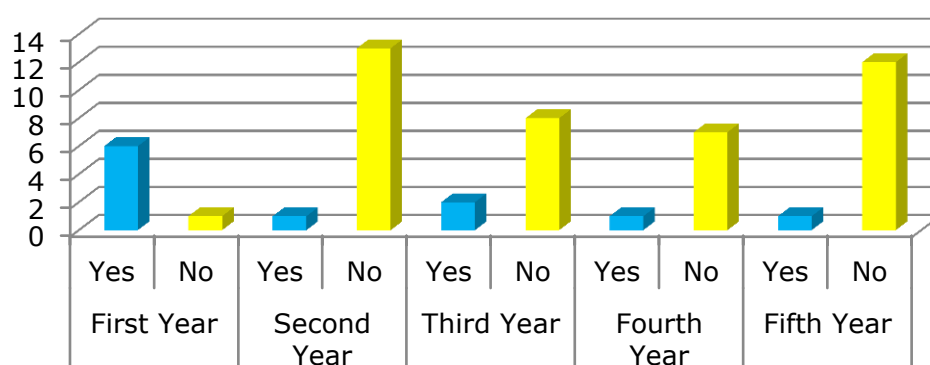
Q 5. Do you think that your youth club helps you to improve the Irish you learn at school?



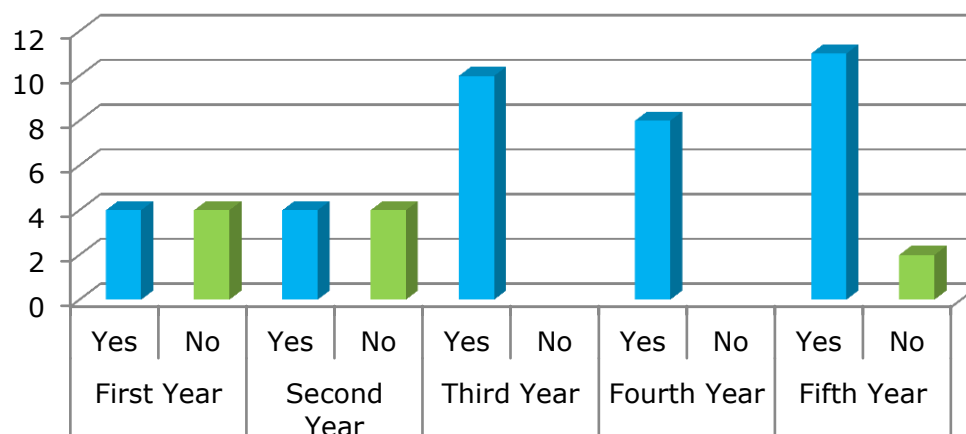
Q 6. Do you think that it is important that you have a chance to speak Irish outside of school?



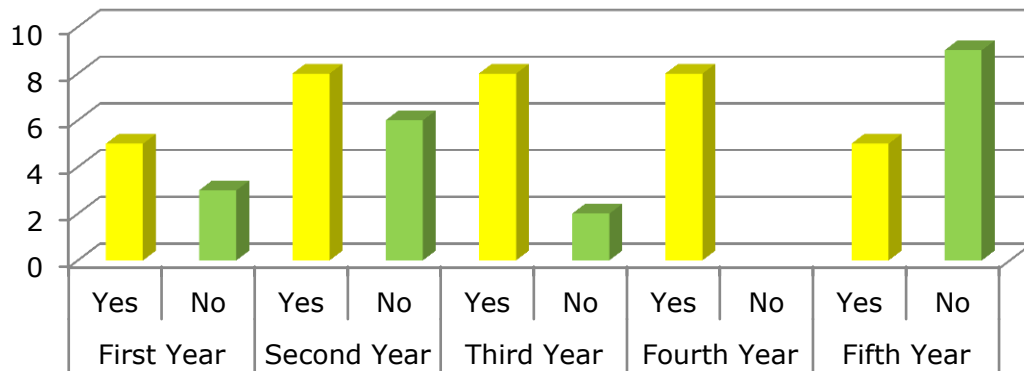
Q 7. Do you have any other opportunities to speak Irish outside of school, aside from at the youth club?



Q 8. Do you think that your youth club is as good as a local English-medium youth club?



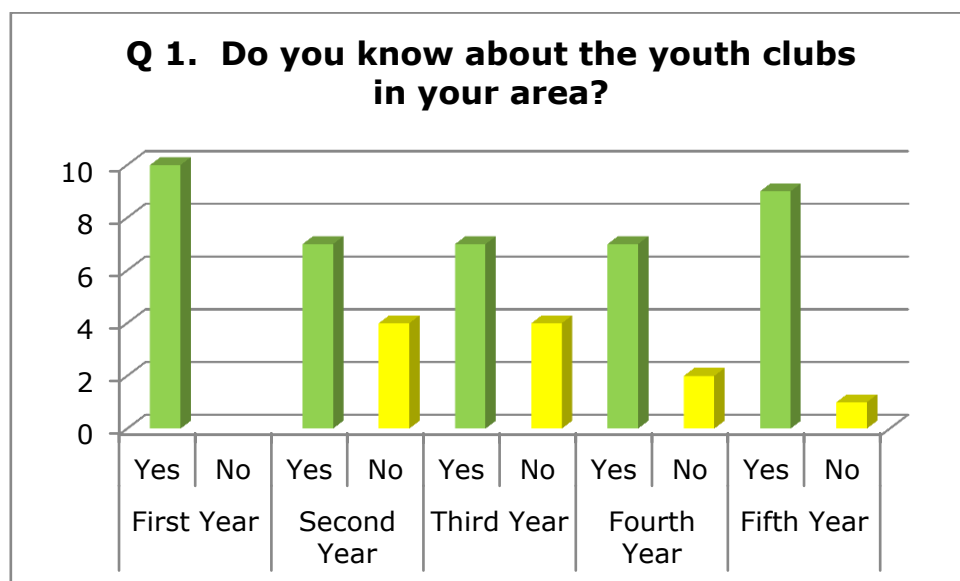
Q 9. Do you think that the facilities and the trips in this youth club are as good as those in the local English-medium youth club?



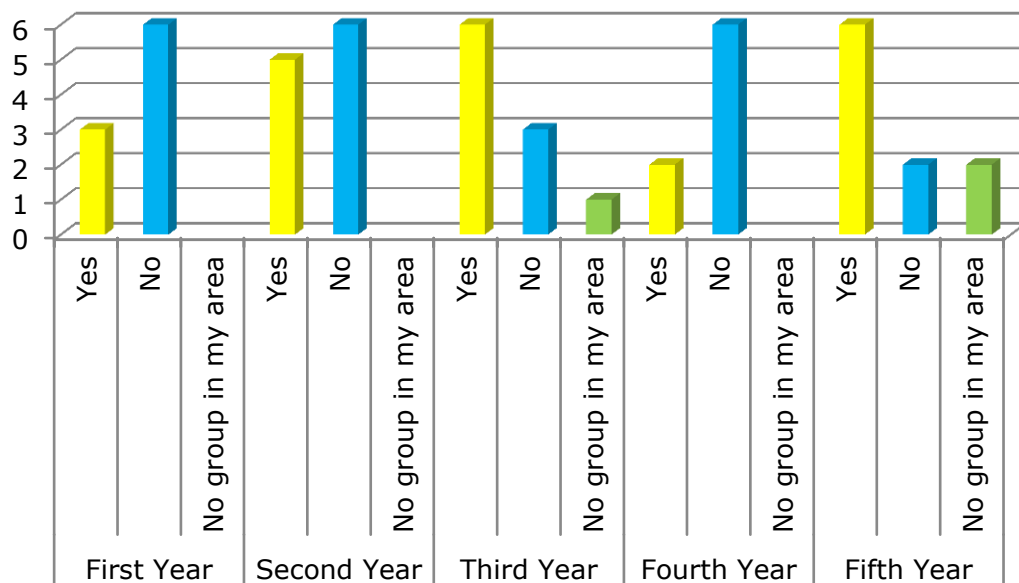
Appendix 2

Questionnaire Results

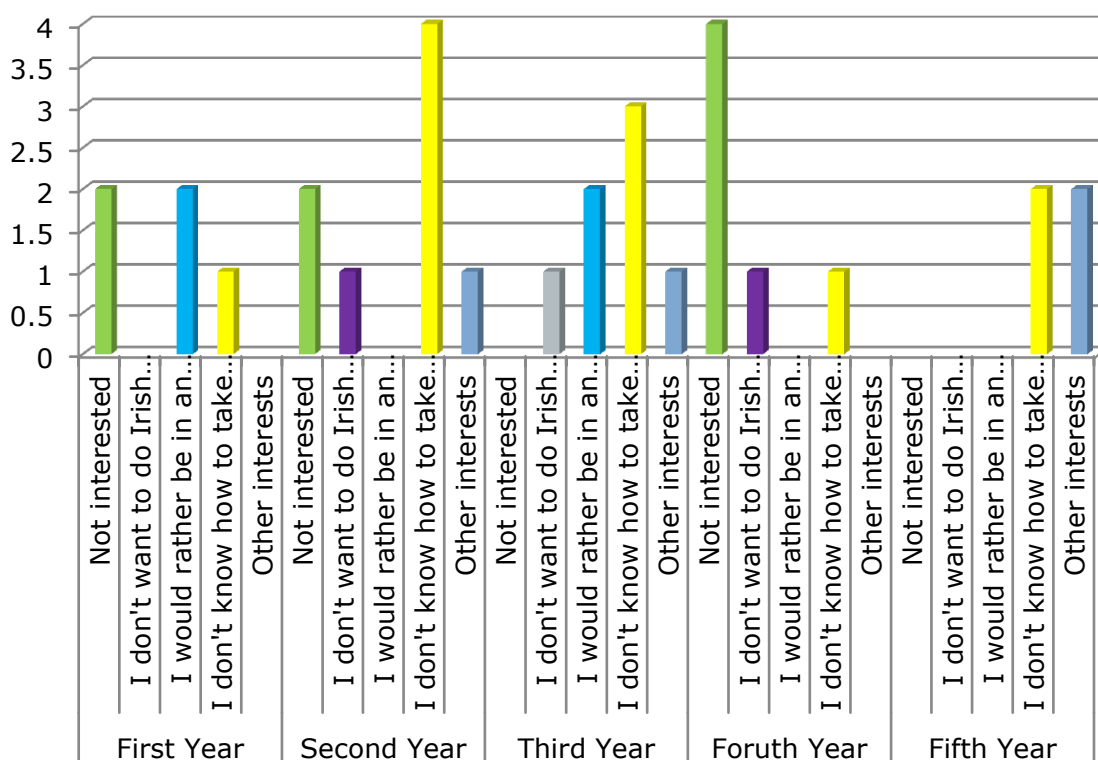
The following questions were asked of young people who attended an Irish-medium school but who were not involved in any Irish-medium youth group. The aim of these questions was to identify the reasons why these young people did not attend any youth club, and what changes could be made in order to encourage them to participate in one.



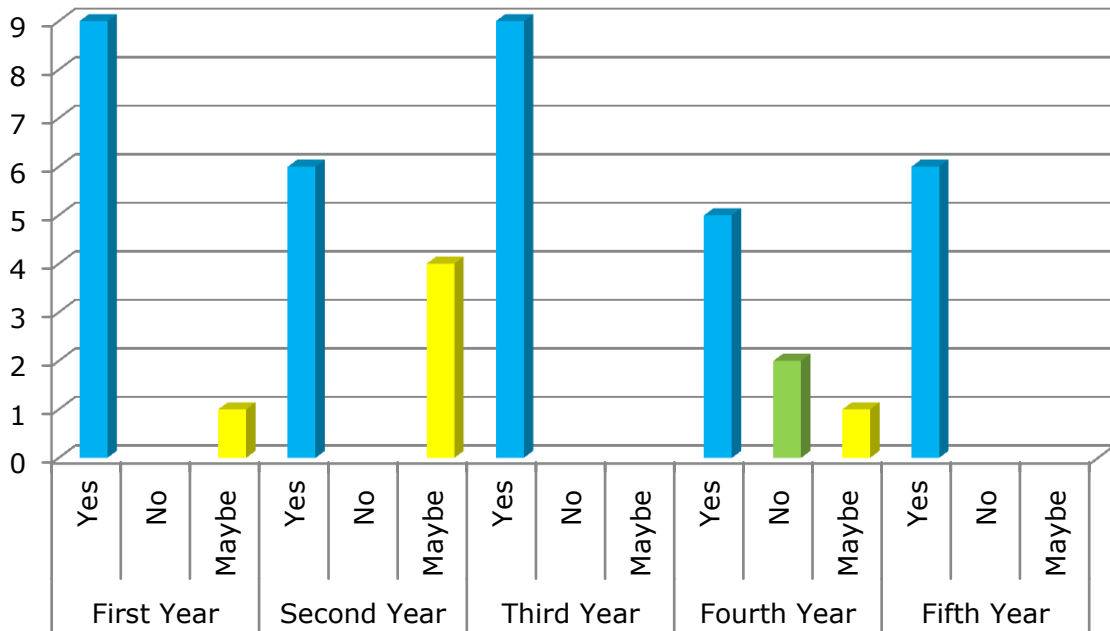
Q 2. Do you know if there is an Irish-medium youth group in your area?



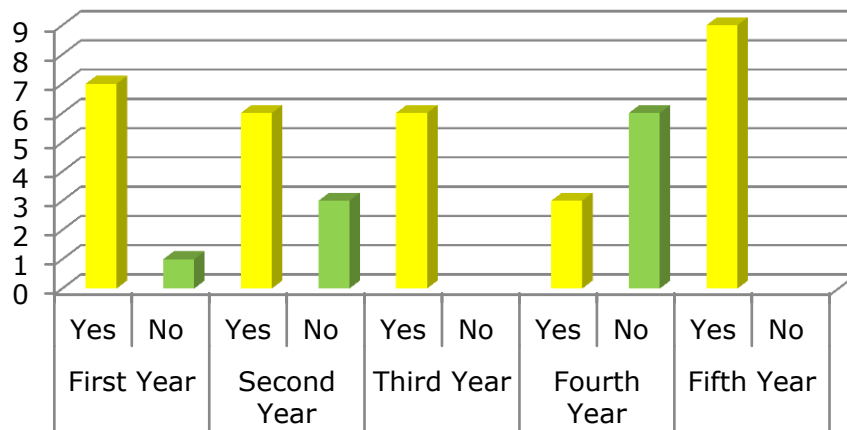
Q 2(a) Why don't you take part in your local Irish-medium youth club?



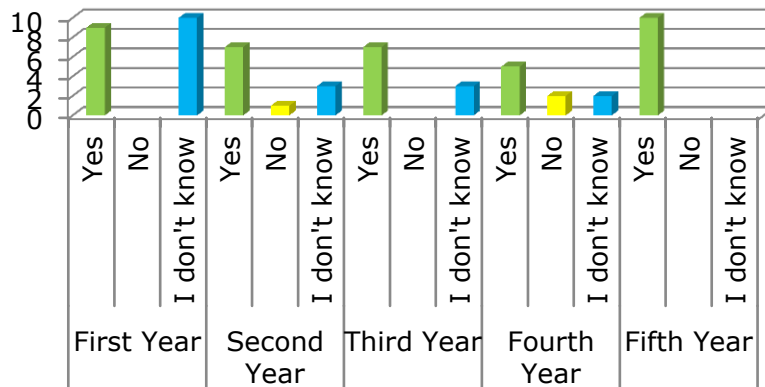
Q 2 (b) Do you think that more publicity would encourage you to find out about the youth services available to you?



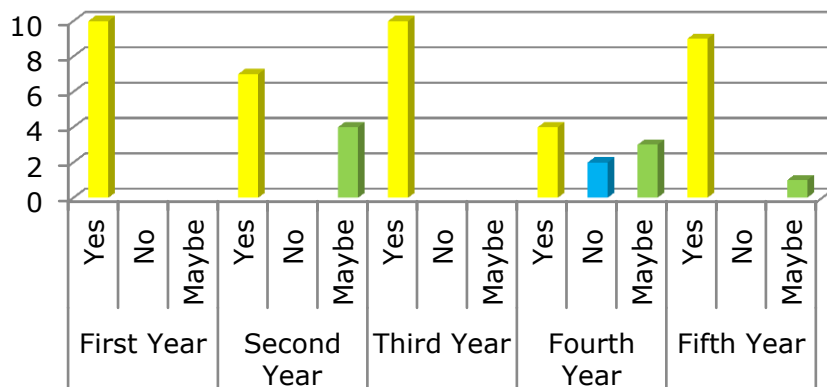
Q 2 (c) Would you like to be a member of an Irish-medium youth club ?



Q 3. Do you think being a member of an Irish-medium youth group would help your Irish?



Q 4. Do you think taking part in activities through Irish would increase your enjoyment of the language?



Appendix 3

Focus groups with young people in Irish-medium youth groups

13 January – 16 January 2014

Part 1: Youth Work

1. Why are you a member of a youth club?
2. Why do you think that youth work is important?

Part 2: The Irish-medium sector

3. Do you think that this club helps with your Irish?
4. Do you have any other opportunity to speak Irish outside of school and the youth club?
5. Do you think that there would be a big difference between being a member of an Irish-medium youth club and an English-medium youth club?

Part 2: Your Experience

6. What is the best thing about this youth club?
7. What is the worst thing about this youth club?
8. What would you like to see in this youth club in the future?
9. What could be done to encourage more young people to take part in this youth club?

Appendix 4

Focus group with youth workers

13 January – 16 January 2014

Part 1: Irish-medium youth work

1. Are there enough training opportunities available for Irish-medium youth workers?
2. What are the main differences between providing Irish-medium youth work and English-medium youth work?

Part 2: Your Experience

3. Do you have the appropriate facilities/assistance to provide youth services here?
4. What are the main strengths of the Irish-medium youth sector?
5. What are the main challenges for the Irish-medium youth sector?

Part 3: Fóram na nÓg

6. What sort of role should Fóram na nÓg have in the future?